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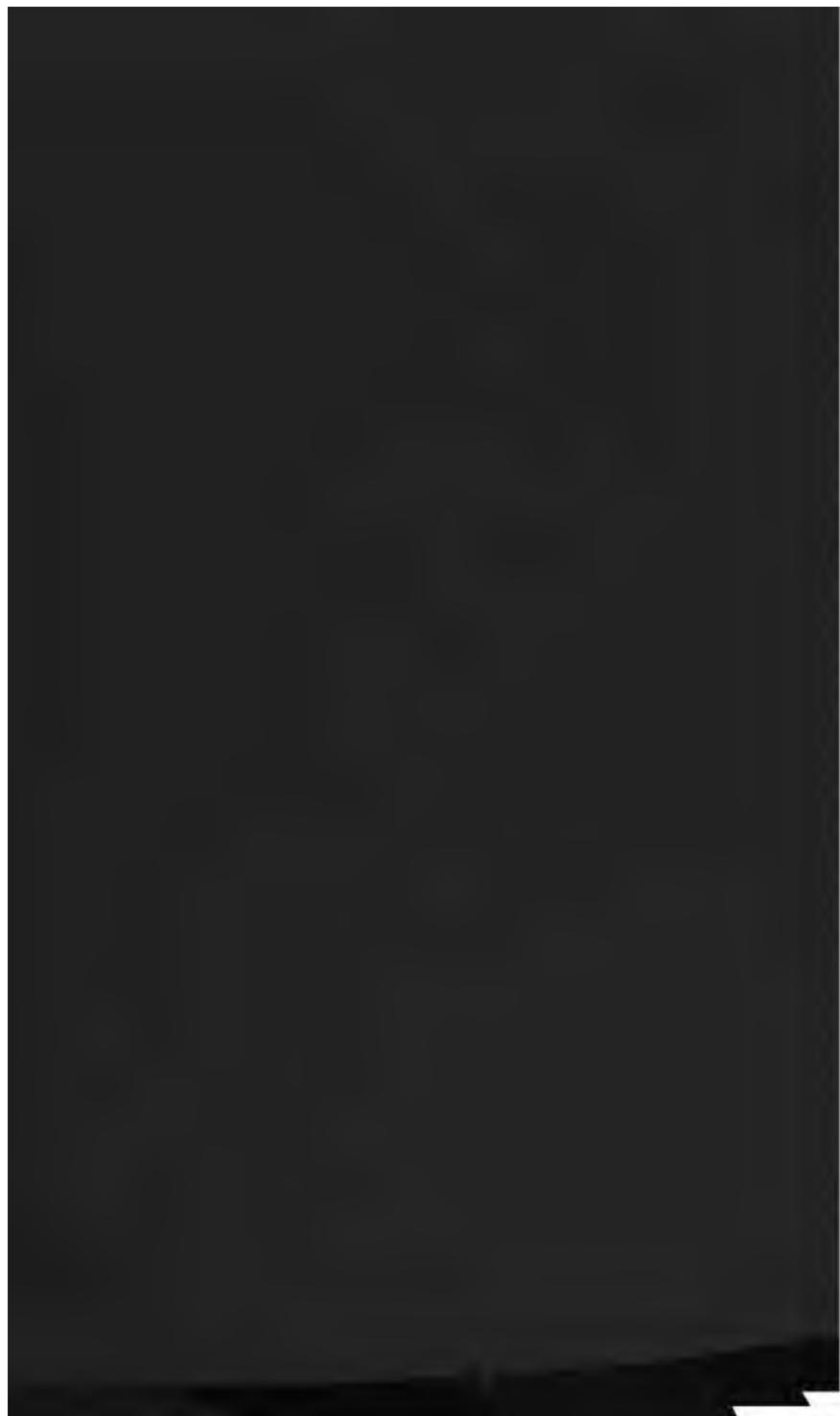
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THREE SERMONS
ON THE
HOLY COMMUNION
BY THE
REV CHRISTOPHER COOKSON, B.D.

100. s.
144.







SPIRITUAL NOURISHMENT.

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SPIRITUAL NOURISHMENT:

Three Sermons

ON THE

HOLY COMMUNION.

BY THE

REV. CHRISTOPHER COOKSON, B.D.

VICAR OF DALLINGTON, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE,
LATE FELLOW AND TUTOR
OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE, OXFORD.

LONDON;
RIVINGTONS, WATERLOO PLACE:
AND HIGH STREET, OXFORD.
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THE small number of Communicants in the Church, of England is surely one of the most melancholy facts in her present history.

When we remember the spiritual virtue which, by our Lord's appointment, attaches especially to the Sacrament of His body and blood, we may well lament and tremble for that *great majority* of professed members of our Church who never partake of it. I am afraid that we of the Clergy are often faint-hearted in exhorting men to come to this precious Ordinance. I am afraid that we are getting to accept, as though it were necessary, the fact that the young, the strong, the busy, the specially-tempted, the worried, almost universally

stay away. But be this as it may, some grievous misunderstanding of the nature and obligations of the Holy Sacrament is undoubtedly fastening itself upon our people, and keeping them from the Table of the Lord.

These Sermons are published with the prayer, that by them some at least of those for whom Christ died may be brought to understand His last bequest better, and to accept it more gratefully.

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SERMON I.

THE INSTITUTION.

LUKE xxii. 19, 20.

“And He took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is My body which is given for you : this do in remembrance of Me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you.”

LET me recall to your minds the scene in which these memorable words were spoken.

It was the Thursday evening in the Passion Week ; the night on which the Son of Man was to be betrayed. Our Blessed Lord and His twelve Apostles were assembled in that “large upper room” in Jerusalem, where He had commanded Peter and John to “prepare that they might eat the Passover.” That Passover was a keeping of the great Festival of the Jewish nation : in it there was observed a solemn Supper, which had been appointed by God Himself more than 1500 years ago.

Year after year, in that city of Jerusalem, it had been commanded to be eaten on a stated day at Spring-time. From all quarters of the country every male was to come up to partake of it. It was a memorial of that night in which Jehovah had wrought a mighty deliverance for their forefathers—of that awful night in which He had sent forth His destroying angel to slay the first-born child in every Egyptian household—to strike him dead in the darkness—and to spare the Israelites, that they might go forth in triumph from the land of bondage on the morning.

To every religious Jew this was indeed a “night much to be observed,” and this Passover, which commemorated it, was a most solemn feast. In preparation for it, a yearling lamb, without blemish, was taken up from the fold four days before, and set apart as a sacred creature. On this Thursday night it was slain solemnly. Its blood was sprinkled on the lintel and side-posts of the door of every house in which this Supper was to be eaten. Not a bone of it was to be broken: it was to be roasted whole. The members of every family were to eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. It was to be consumed entirely: that which could not be eaten was to be burnt with fire. Such was to be the food of that feast—a lamb in its earliest strength, perfect, consecrated, slain,

and then consumed ; bitter herbs ; and unleavened bread. And the manner of the feast was not less remarkable : it was to be eaten with loins girded (the long, loose garment belted up, as if preparing for a journey), shoes on the feet, staff in hand.

And now in that large upper room, where, for the last time, Christ and His twelve Apostles were assembled, the table was thus set out, the feast was thus prepared ; and He and His Apostles were doubtless thus accoutred. The lamb, whole and unblemished, was before them ; the bitter herbs were there, the unleavened bread. There was there also wine, a thing which, from a time past recollecting, had been added to the divinely-appointed materials of that Supper.

Such were the objects that met the eye. Peter and John had prepared them there. And, in the thoughts of the Apostles, we cannot doubt that there was the recollection of that event which this Paschal Supper had been instituted to commemorate ; we cannot doubt that, as befitted pious Jews, there was a thankful remembrance of the deliverance of their forefathers from Egyptian bondage.

This Passover, I have said, was a solemn occasion always. But now there was more than ordinary solemnity in it. Now there could not but be a mysterious awe in the minds of the Apostles. Their

Master had come up to Jerusalem with more than ordinary preparation to keep this Feast; all the way from Galilee,—the whole length of the land,—He had journeyed, preaching in every town. As they drew nearer to Jerusalem, and after they had entered it, His talk with them had become more and more solemn; His announcements that He was about to die more clear; His warnings to those who received Him not more stern and full of terror. He had spoken to them of His being delivered into the hands of the chief priests; of His being crucified. He had delivered to the people the parable of the unfaithful labourers in the vineyard, whom their lord should come and “destroy miserably;” He had forewarned them of a day when of all the goodly buildings in Jerusalem not one stone should be left upon another; He had spoken of signs in earth and heaven; of earthquakes and famine; the sun darkened and the moon refusing to give her light; and the Son of Man coming in the clouds of Heaven. The consummation of their Lord’s ministry must have seemed to the Apostles to be drawing near; that to which it had all been tending must have appeared to be at last coming to pass. Their minds must have been full of anxious, wondering expectation. This Passover must surely have been looked forward to by

them as the most solemn that they had ever kept.

And if such was the state of the Apostles' minds already—if it was with these feelings that they sat down to that Paschal Supper, the words which their Lord spoke to them as they sat at meat, were calculated to increase the solemnity of their thoughts, and to fill them still fuller with mysterious wonder concerning that which might be coming upon them.

He said unto them, “With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it shall have been fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” It was then indeed His last Passover after this fashion: He would no longer thus eat it with them; no longer unite with them in this the most sacred of all the outward services of Jehovah;—and henceforth He said it was to be “fulfilled in the Kingdom of God.” What could He intend by that? Often had they heard Him speak of that Kingdom; and whenever He did so, it was with a mystery, it was in parables, or hard sayings; and now He told them that in that Kingdom this Passover should be fulfilled, should have its full accomplishment; that that to which it had for 1500 years been tending should therein come to pass. How these words must have

struck them ! how, as the Supper proceeded, they must have dwelt upon their minds !

And so the solemn meal went on, and the Paschal Lamb was being consumed.

And, as they were eating, “Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, He brake it, and gave it to them, saying, This is My Body which is given for you : do this in remembrance of Me.” “Likewise after Supper,” (or rather, as the words might more properly be translated, while supper was going on,) “He took the cup”—the cup of wine, which had by custom been added to the lamb, and bread, and bitter herbs—He took this cup, “and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it ; for this is My Blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” And they ate that bread and drank that cup ; and so the first Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ was received.

Now let us endeavour to put ourselves in the place of the Apostles, as with those mysterious words, “This is My body ; this is My blood,” they received that bread and wine at their Master’s hand. Let us try to imagine how they must then have understood these expressions. They were sitting at the Paschal Supper ; they had been eating the Passover. That Passover, our Lord

had just told them, should, when He had suffered (as shortly, they felt, He was about to suffer), be "fulfilled in the kingdom of God." Was it possible that the Apostles should fail to see that by that suffering itself should be the "fulfilling of the Passover," of which He had spoken; that the shedding of His blood, the breaking of His body, would be the slaying of the true Paschal Lamb; that Christ was the Victim "without blemish, and without spot," of which that slain Lamb had been for ages but the type and symbol?

Now if the Apostles were enabled thus to understand Christ's words, in what sense would they receive this new rite, which Christ now instituted? What would they take to be the meaning of the giving of bread and wine with the words, "This is My body that is broken, this is My blood that is shed?" Surely they would understand this receiving of bread and wine to be the appointed means whereby they were to partake of the benefits of Christ's death—of that broken body and that shed blood, of which these things were the tokens; that as Christ was the true Paschal Lamb—the Victim whose death should deliver from eternal death and bondage, so the means whereby to partake of that deliverance was the reception of that bread and wine: "Take, eat, this is the body of Me, the true Paschal Lamb, slain for the sins of

men ; drink, this is My blood, shed for their remission." My death will be the " fulfilling in God's kingdom," of that to which the Passover has all along been pointing—the spiritual and eternal deliverance from a bondage worse than that of Egypt ; and this act of eating bread and drinking wine is the means which I now appoint, whereby you may partake of this inestimable blessing. This do as oft as ye drink it in remembrance of Me. As often as ye thus partake of bread and wine, partake of them in remembrance of My death ; as the means of sharing in the deliverance from sin, which that death will ere long accomplish. With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer—this Passover which by that suffering is now about to be fulfilled in the kingdom of Heaven—this Passover which henceforth I will eat no more, which is now about to cease, but which shall be succeeded by a new rite, of which it has been, all along, the type ; by a feeding, not carnally on the body of a lamb, but spiritually on My spiritual body ; by no outward sprinkling with the blood of a dead creature, but by a washing of the soul in My out poured life ; by a partaking of Me who am the full and perfect expiation for guilt, the real Paschal Victim, and the true and only nourishment of man's spirit. Such is the *communion with Me* which henceforth is possible ;

such the possibility of union for the redeemed with their Redeemer ; such the unseen presence of Myself within your souls which at My departure I am leaving to you. And the means of receiving it is this which you now see Me institute—this bread and wine. Thus received, as I appoint them, they are no mere nourishment and food to the body ; they are true strengthening to the soul. For he that, with faith in Me and My death, thus eats them, does spiritually receive My spiritual body ; his human nature feeds on Me ; My strength, My merits, My life pass into him ; his sinful body is made clean by My body ; his soul washed through My most precious blood ; he does, in a way that is blessed far beyond his understanding, “dwell in Me, and I in him.”

Some such meaning as this we may well suppose that the Apostles attached to our Lord’s words and our Lord’s actions, as they sat with Him at that last Paschal Supper, and received from His hands this new Ordinance—this Communion of bread and wine.

I do not say that they understood it all at first, for as yet their faith was weak and uninformed ; but the more they meditated upon what Christ had said and what He had done, the more, we must suppose, God’s Spirit taught them to see this meaning in it. And this, at least, they must have

felt even then, that Christ intended to show them that He, in His approaching death, was to be the true Lamb of God, of whom that lamb which they had been eating was the type ; that as they had heretofore eaten that sacrificed victim in memory of the deliverance of their forefathers from the land of bondage, so hereafter they were to eat that bread and wine in remembrance of Him their Redeemer, and as a means of partaking of His body and blood which were soon to be given for them.

In some such way as this the Apostles must have understood this first Communion, instituted as it was in the midst of the Paschal Supper.

Hereafter, doubtless, the Holy Spirit, who at His coming was to guide them into all the truth, would teach them the mysterious significance and power of this Sacrament still more clearly.

Nor were they alone to understand it thus.

To one who was not as yet of their number, but who, hereafter, was to be "not a whit behind the chiefest of them all,"—to the great Apostle Paul, Christ was Himself to reveal the history of this Supper, of which they were then partaking ; to disclose to him the institution of this Sacrament ; and St. Paul, too, was to perceive that therein the true Paschal Feast was accomplished ; *the true "Lamb of God"* spiritually eaten. He

was able to say that the bread which is broken in that Sacrament is the Communion—the partaking in common—of the body of Christ; the cup of blessing that is there blessed is “the Communion of the blood of Christ.” He was to see, too, that this was no transitory rite, but rather one that should endure to the world’s end, till the return of Him whom it commemorated; that “as oft as that bread was eaten, and that cup drunk,” the faithful “should show forth”—should openly proclaim—“their Lord’s death till He came.”

And there were also words which our Lord had before spoken—words at which His disciples had been offended, and many of them had “gone back from Him”—but which the Apostles, doubtless, would recall hereafter, and understand more clearly; expressions, I mean, in which He had spoken of feeding upon Himself, of “eating His flesh, and drinking His blood.” “Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you; for My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.” These words, they should learn hereafter, intended no material eating of Christ’s sacred body; their meaning was not “flesh” (as our Lord had warned them), but “spirit.” They spoke of meat and drink, not for the body, but for the soul; of a spiritual strengthening and refreshing, which was now declared to

flow from the faithful receiving of those material outward elements of bread and wine. Those elements were means which Christ appointed. To despise those means, therefore, to neglect to receive that bread and wine, was, so far, to forego the blessing which He vouchsafed to offer—it was, moreover, to disregard His last command; to reject that dying appeal to the gratitude of them for whom He was about to suffer, “Do this in remembrance of Me.”

Thus have I endeavoured to describe to you the first institution of the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper; the solemn and affecting manner in which our blessed Lord gave it to His Apostles at the Passover, before He suffered. I have endeavoured, also, to explain to you the meaning which the Apostles must at the time have attached to it, on account of the occasion on which our Lord appointed it, and on account of the action and words with which He accompanied it.

I have shown you also, how St. Paul understood it, when afterwards it was revealed specially to him; and what further light was thrown upon it by an earlier discourse of our Lord, which, at the time that it was spoken, had been but little comprehended. And the sum of all I have said is this,—that in the Supper of our Lord, from the *very first*, *Christ was seen to be “the very Pas-*

chal Lamb that was offered for us ;” and that to “ those who rightly, worthily, and with faith, receive that Sacrament, the bread which we break is a partaking of the Body of Christ, and likewise the cup of blessing is a partaking of the Blood of Christ.”

I have thus confined myself to the history of the first institution of this holy Ordinance, and to a statement of its intention and meaning.

I desire, in the next Sermon, to speak to you of the solemn obligation under which we lie to partake of this Divine food, and the great danger of those who receive it not.

And after that, I trust to be able to say something in answer to fears and excuses, which often keep men away from their Lord’s Table, in the hope that to some of my readers they may be excuses and fears no longer.

And God grant that, even by my unworthy words, there may be some who shall be brought back to that heavenly Feast, which, in better days, they have frequented; and that some may come for the first time and taste it !

SERMON II.

THE OBLIGATION.

1 COR. x. 16.

“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the Blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the Body of Christ?”

I DESIRE now, under the guidance of all those portions of the New Testament which speak of this divine Ordinance, and in obedience to that Holy Spirit who inspired them, to urge upon you the solemn duty of partaking of the Sacrament of Christ’s Body, and to enforce it by all the considerations which it involves.

In the first place, then, I cannot but speak of our blessed Lord’s own tender appeal, “Do this, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me:” His last request—the thing that He asked of them for whom He was even then about to die; *the petition that He left behind Him to the whole*

world ; the proof which He at that hour required of their love ; the act which His immeasurable tenderness exacted from them,—“ Do this in remembrance of Me.” As though He had said, Do this all of you for whom I die ; even in this My night of agony ; even with your sins coming heavy upon Me ; even with My soul “ exceeding sorrowful,” with a sense as if the Father Himself deserted Me, I ask this of you ; and I take comfort in the hope that you will thus remember Me. I console Myself with the anticipation that, to the end of time, My followers throughout the world will eat this bread and drink this wine as a sign of gratitude and love to Him who died for them ; that they will thus declare that My sacrifice shall not be in vain for them ; but that by My cross, and grave, and resurrection, they desire that their souls may escape from sin and the death eternal.

My Brethren, could any thing be more affecting, if it had been but a mere Man’s appeal ? But it is no mere Man’s appeal ; it is the pleading of the Lord God Almighty. Can hearts of Christians be so hard, that they can hear it without being moved —can disregard it without being afraid ?

Surely, no man who understands this command, and habitually neglects it, can pretend to have real gratitude and love towards Christ ; can, with any honesty, say that in his heart he desires to do

His will, and really strives to obey Him. But, my Brethren, it is not only to our gratitude that Christ appeals in this Sacrament, He appeals also to our love of our own souls, and our desire that they should live; for He offers us therein the "bread of life,"—even Himself. "Take, eat; this is My body. Drink; this is My blood." In that holy feast we do spiritually, and after a heavenly fashion, "eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood." Our souls receive that cleansing and strengthening nourishment on which their true life depends—that on which faith feeds; they have communion with Christ Himself; they become one with Him, and participate mystically in His life; the body and blood of Christ are verily and indeed taken and received by them. "This is that bread which came down from heaven, that we may eat thereof and not die." How this communion with our Lord takes place in the Sacrament we know not; it becomes us not to inquire. We know that it is no gross, material feeding upon His body. That were unworthy of the heavenly majesty of Christ, it were alien to the verity of His nature as Man; nay, it were to deny the truth of His body altogether; for it were to suppose that that body which is in heaven is at the same time upon earth.

"*We ask not concerning the mode of His pre-*

"sence in His Sacraiment ; we confess the mystery
"to be more sublime than our intellects can grasp,
"or than words can tell. But we embrace, without
"questioning, the truth of God, in which we can
"safely acquiesce. He pronounces His flesh the
"food of our souls, His blood the drink. And we
"offer our souls to be fed with such aliments. In
"His sacred feast He bids us, under symbols of
"bread and wine, to take His body and to eat and
"drink. We doubt not but that He really offers,
"and that we receive¹."

"What these elements of bread and wine are in
"themselves it matters not. It is enough that
"unto us that take them they are, by Christ's
"promise, His body and blood. His word in
"witness thereof suffices. Why should any further
"cogitation possess our souls ; but, 'Oh, my God,
"thou art true ! Oh, my soul, thou art happy² !'

If, then, we desire that we should "dwell in
Christ, and Christ in us ;" that "we should be one
with Christ, and Christ with us," let us come to
that table where He offers Himself ; let our hearts
be eager to receive Him ; let us long that "our
bodies may be washed by His body, and our souls
cleansed through His most precious blood :" and
let us fear, lest if we neglect to seek Him there,

¹ Calvin.

² Hooker.

He will not give Himself to us at all, and so we shall still remain unclean, and weak, and lifeless ; nay, let us suspect, my Brethren, that the true reason which keeps us back from our Master's Table is, that we desire not His presence within us —that we do not really wish to be pure, and loving, and unworldly, and given wholly unto Him.

And if in this Holy Sacrament we can be united with our Lord, if it is a means of fellowship with Him, it is also a bond of union and fellowship with His Church, with all Christian people throughout the world. If we are joined to Christ our Head, then are we also united with His members ; we are “one body in Him, and all of us members one of another.” And this Sacrament is indeed the feast of unity. It has ever been esteemed so in the Church. St. Paul so speaks of it. “We,” he says, “being many, are one bread and one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread.” Nor is this union a dead thing that cannot make itself felt : it speaks in the heart of every true Christian ; it manifests itself in that love which sees Christ in those for whom He died, which loves them because they are the objects of His love ; which feels towards them a sense of compassionate tenderness quite distinct from mere natural kindness ; it makes *itself known in “the great cloud of witnesses that*

compass us about," witnesses that rouse, and cheer, and support us here, and fill us with anticipations of heavenly intercourse hereafter. It joins us to good people whom we love on earth by a bond which even now we feel can never be entirely broken, and which promises to reunite us everlastingly.

And when, I may ask with confidence, is this fellowship felt so truly, when do earthly ties seem so pure and blessed, when do they seem to have so much of heaven in them, as when we kneel with those we love at the Lord's Table? When do our hearts warm and expand themselves towards our Christian brethren so sensibly, as when they behold in this Sacrament their common Saviour, and feel in themselves a spark of His own undying, pervading love?

Oh! my Brethren, if you believe that fellowship with the good is worth the having; if you desire to have something in common with the spirits and souls of the righteous, come to this Sacrament and take the "blood of sprinkling," by which each one of them is cleansed: receive here that life which pervades them all. If you persist in staying away, fear lest ye cut yourselves off from "the goodly fellowship of the Saints."

But further, this Holy Sacrament is a most effectual means of sanctification and grace.

Often in the Bible is the Holy Ghost called the Spirit of Christ; Christ it is, who, according to His promise to the Apostles, “sends Him to us, from the Father.” It is to those who are united with Christ that He comes; it is in those whom He is not ashamed to call His Brethren that He pleads, and cries within them, “Abba, Father.” This Holy Spirit is the great gift which Christ has left behind Him; He has not “left us comfortless;” in this Divine Person He “comes unto us;” He comes to those who ask for Him of the Father in Christ’s name, who believe that their crucified Lord is gone away that He might send Him unto them; and that it is because Christ “died for their sins and rose again for their justification” that this Holy Spirit deigns now to dwell in hearts which otherwise had been altogether unclean things, which otherwise had been afraid to draw nigh to their God, desirous, in their consciousness of sin, that He should depart from them, feeling themselves altogether unfit to be His dwelling-place.

My Brethren, if we have any love to Christ, it is not of our own engendering; it is because by His death He has procured the coming to us of this Holy Spirit, who makes us love Him: if, then, we would have that love increase within us, we must seek that Spirit more; we must seek Him by the

means which Christ has given us, by means which are the symbols and signs of that Sacrifice which alone induces Him to come to us ; we must seek Him in that bread and wine which our Lord has consecrated as channels whereby we may partake of Himself, and so receive this sanctifying Spirit who proceeds from Him, and works in the hearts of those who in this sacred Supper unite themselves mystically to their Lord.

If we would be accepted guests at that table, we must pray the Holy Ghost to prepare our hearts to meet our Redeemer there ; we must beg Him “to take of the things of Christ, and show them unto us ;” to show us all His love, and pity, and forgiveness ; all His humiliation, and death, and resurrection ; all His meritorious satisfaction, and unceasing intercession ; all His desire that by His sacrifice we should be for ever safe.

Such are the gracious promises that are made to the faithful Communicant ; so divine a thing is this Holy Sacrament to those who receive it worthily. Warnings indeed there are to those who come to that table unprepared ; but there is also an awful denunciation to those who neglect to come. “ Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you.” Let those who feel that their lives are so careless, or so bad, that they dare not partake of th-

Sacrament, ponder well these words of Christ ; let those who flatter themselves that they are good Christians, though they are not Communicants, consider well how great may be their loss if they neglect His own appointed means of partaking of Himself.

Think not that I would desire any man to come rashly. They who do come are called upon there to "offer and present themselves, their souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto God ;" and this, by the assistance of God's grace, therein especially communicated, they can be enabled to perform ; but to refuse thus to offer ourselves, is to be "none of His ;" it is not to be in earnest about the work of our salvation ; it is to be *playing at religion*, not feeling that, if it is any thing, it is the "one thing needful ;" that it admits of no half-measures, that it allows us not to obey when we like and to disobey when we like, but rather requires us to give our whole selves to God ; that He says to us, "My son, give Me thy *heart* ;" and we may rest assured that to those who do this, and to those only, "His ways are ways of pleasantness, and all His paths are peace." Difficulties there will be for each of us, I do not disguise them ; but peace and salvation are too great things to be won without difficulty. To those who *are yet untrained in devotion* there must be in-

creased difficulty ; but let their own experience teach them how much the hardships will be aggravated by further delay ; let them think of the baseness of that ingratitude that can forget Him who died for them ; let them remember that “ he that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life ;” let them examine their own hearts, and acknowledge that without God’s Spirit they are helpless for good, and altogether impure, and let them come, with God’s faithful people, to this Sacrament, in which their Saviour offers Himself to them as their Redeemer, their life, their Sanctifier—let them come for His sake who died for them—let them come for their own souls’ sake, which may at any hour be taken from them.

SERMON III.

THE EXCUSES.

JOHN vi. 53.

“ Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood,
ye have no life in you.”

IN the last Sermon I spoke of the great privileges attached to the worthy receiving of the Lord’s Supper—privileges so great and blessed, so fitted to satisfy the soul’s most constant, as well as its highest needs, that, if we knew not how little men really feel the transcendent value of their souls, we might be surprised that professing Christians should so frequently neglect them.

I now propose to deal with some of the commonest excuses whereby men try to explain and to justify their staying away from the Lord’s Table.

I shall not now speak to open and great sinners: they stand self-convicted. I shall confine myself to those who really profess to be living *Christian lives.*

I trust that I am not altogether incapable of sympathizing with the doubts and difficulties which, in various degrees and different forms, beset each of us in the things that concern our souls; and yet I feel that I should but conceal the truth, and use a weak and dangerous smoothness of speech, if I did not say at the outset that I believe that the fact which is at the bottom of the excuses, of which I shall now have to treat, is this,—that men are not really, thoroughly in earnest about serving God; that they are not willing to give Him their *undivided* hearts to search for His will, and unreservedly to do it; that there is something in them very different from what it should be. It may be it is spiritual indolence—a sin of the very commonest occurrence—most unsuspected often, and yet most fatal; it may be it is want of faith in God's appointed means of grace; it may be it is a secret reluctance to becoming, not only almost, but altogether Christ's; it may be it is a shrinking from the responsibility which attaches to the full and open profession of the Christian life; it may be that it is a spirit of disobedience which rebels against a simple compliance with their Saviour's command; it may be that it is the cherishing of some half-suspected sin; it may be it is some other form of self-deceit; but it is hardly ever a real, careful, honest, heart-searching

endeavour to do that which is right in the sight of God.

I know that it may be said that some such explanation as this can be given of every shortcoming of which men are guilty ; that the best of us have failings akin to some of those which I have now recounted. Yes, my Brethren, all of us, doubtless, have our special faults and failings, against which we must fight constantly, and which, by God's grace, we must try to conquer. But this absenting ourselves from the Lord's Table is no ordinary, no light sin ; not a guilt which from day to day we may hope to have washed out by Christ ; not a temptation which we may expect to find subdued insensibly by the power of the Holy Ghost within us ; it is rather a neglect of the most plain and solemn command ; a neglect which implies that there is something *radically* wrong in our hearts ; and it is, moreover, a cutting ourselves off from one of the greatest and most powerful of all means of amendment.

It is, therefore, a thing of the greatest danger to the soul.

Having said thus much, I will proceed to the particular consideration of some of the many excuses which are given for this sin.

In the first place, then, men presume to say that *they cannot come to the Lord's Supper*, "because

they are so busy." Now, my Brethren, to be busy is the duty of us all: "if a man will not work, neither shall he eat." There is plenty of work for each of us. But to say that we cannot come to the Lord's Supper because we are busy, is to say that the world is getting so completely into our thoughts, and is creeping so into our affections, that there is little room for God there. It shows also that we are doing our work in a wrong spirit. If our calling is a lawful one, then there can be nothing in it that need keep our hearts from God; for it is a fulfilling of the lot which He Himself has appointed for us. Temptations it may involve, many and hard; but all these can be turned to good; they can be made opportunities of proving ourselves Christians; they may become schools of patience, or temperance, or charity, or holy courage. Hard as our work may be, exciting as it may be, or, on the contrary, dull and wearisome, still the frame of our mind may be, all the while, such as becomes Christ's servants. Deep down in our hearts there may be the love of God, the wish for His glory, the desire of His favour. Often from the spirit there may go up to heaven the unbreathed prayer, the silent devotion of duty faithfully fulfilled, the unuttered longing for higher and holier things. And if this is hard, as hard it often is, then there is but the greater need for

seizing this great means of grace, this blessed Sacrament: there is still greater reason for coming to the Table of the Lord, where the world is most shut out; for communing there with our own selves, and with our future Judge; for receiving the spiritual food which may keep our souls strong, and enable them to resist the taint of sin and worldliness with which the air all round us is infected. If we will come to this Sacrament in faith, longing to be made partakers of Christ therein, to become more like Him, to be more identified with His merits, then from thence we shall find ourselves going forth to our work again with lighter and stouter hearts, with higher aims in doing it, greater comfort under its trials, greater strength against its temptations, and a surer hope of something beyond and above it all. But if we will not break off so far from worldly labour as to come here and claim our membership with Christ, then we may well fear, lest, every day, earthly cares obtain a faster hold upon us, and fetter our souls more strongly, and make them, at last, altogether grovelling.

But there is an excuse more unnatural even than this; there is the excuse of those who say that they cannot come because they are in trouble. Surely this is the strangest plea of all. *Is not Christ the great Consoler? Is His blessed*

invitation grown powerless, "Come unto Me, all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you?" Are not troubles God's own sending, the scourgings of a loving Father? the very token that He is willing to receive us? If our souls are restless; if they feel impatient and unresigned; if they pine for something to fill up the place of that which God has taken from us; here, in this Sacrament, they will find God Himself, the fountain of all peace and blessedness; here they will find sympathy at once divine and human; here they may receive a calm and a contentment which even they themselves will wonder at; here they may feel a finger laid upon them, at whose touch their blinded eyes shall open and see the light breaking beyond the darkness, and even now broadening round them.

But there are also others who say that they do not like to come to the Lord's Supper because they feel that it is a very solemn thing to come there, and they think that they are too ignorant to do so. This is an excuse that may surprise some of you, but nevertheless it is only too common.

My poorer brethren, if there are any among you who stay away from the Holy Communion because you are *no scholars*, and because you feel that it is a solemn mystery which you but ill

understand, I beseech you to listen to a few words which I would in all affection say to you.

If there is any thing connected with this Sacrament which you are ignorant of, and which it is in your power to learn, then it is your bounden duty to learn it. You hear that it is a thing of the greatest importance to your souls. If you have doubts and difficulties about it, then try by all means within your reach to have them explained to you. Talk about them to your more educated neighbours ; go to your clergyman and ask him, as he is bound, to quiet you. Above all, ask God to enlighten you. But if after all your ignorance troubles you, still do not let it keep you away. If it is not your fault, then God will not judge you for it. You know,—the most ignorant of you knows,—that Christ is your only hope for the next world, that He has died for your sins, that He is now sitting at God's right hand to plead for you. You know that He will come at the last day to judge you. You know that this Sacrament was the last thing that He commanded before He died for you ; and that by it He has promised to strengthen your souls against sin and the Devil's power. If, therefore, you are really sorry for the sins that made Him die ; if you desire by His help to forsake them all ; then come to *this Holy Communion* in token of your gratitude,

in token of your desire to amend, in full hope of receiving help to your souls from Him. Fear not to come because of your ignorance. Pray to Him with that prayer which He answered so bountifully of old, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." Rouse within you all the holy love, and fear, and hope of which you are capable, and ask Him to increase it a hundredfold. Already you know more of Christ and of the mysteries of His Kingdom than many a sick and helpless man did who came to Him when He was upon earth, and for that mere act of coming received at His hands healing, and heard from His lips words more precious still than healing, even the blessed assurance, "Thy faith hath saved thee;" already you know more of Christ than did those untaught fishermen, His first Apostles, who, at His simple bidding, forsook all and followed Him, forsook their trade, and received for that forsaking the mysterious privilege of living on earth with the Son of God, and proclaiming to the whole world the hidden wonders of His Kingdom. Many, I know, are the privileges from which your poverty and your want of learning cut you off; but this receiving of Christ assuredly is not one of them. "Hath not God chosen the poor in this world, rich in faith, heirs of the kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him?"

But there is another excuse for staying away from the Lord's Supper, which I feel that I ought to approach with special tenderness and caution. I mean that sense of guiltiness and demerit which keeps fearful souls away from a mystery which they know to be very sacred, and hinders them from claiming a blessing of which they feel themselves to be quite unworthy. I am not now speaking of great sinners, of those who are not endeavouring to serve God—of those who are careless about the condition of their souls, and insensible to all that Christ has done for them, and all that He requires in return—who think little of God's holiness and their own sinfulness. God forbid that I should urge those who are unrepenting and confessedly without any real religion, to profane this holy feast. These assuredly are unfit to come; but let them remember how fearfully unfit, too, they are to die. Most dangerous indeed is their state, most pitiful; but I cannot stay now to speak to them. I would desire rather to say some words of comfort and encouragement to those weak ones who, feeling their lack of strength, have not boldness to come here and receive strength. I would desire to lend a helping hand to those spiritual cripples, who have lain, many years perhaps, beside the healing pool, and yet have not the power and the resolution to fling themselves into its waters, when One,

greater than an angel, comes down to trouble them.

My Brethren, if you feel how cold your love is, how little you have done for Christ; think, I beseech you, how infinite is His love, how great things He has done for you. If you feel that there is nothing in you that can make Him love you, remember that His love is measured, not by your worthiness, but by His own infinite longing for your happiness and your good. Remember that even the Saints in light are clothed, not in their own righteousness, but in the righteousness of Christ only, in robes washed white in His blood; think, therefore, that if you desire to be cleansed, you must be cleansed alone in Him; that you must long to receive *all* of Himself that He is willing to give; that the only cure for your weakness is His strength; the only nourishment for your fainting souls is His life; and that here, in this Sacrament, He offers them to you. Remember that He has said that "him that cometh unto Him, He will in no wise cast out;" that the very fact that we feel ourselves weak, is the strongest reason why we should take the food which the Great Physician offers; that to think that He is unwilling to receive us, is to do Him injustice; that it is to disbelieve His own announcement of Himself as the Saviour of the lost; *that if we would be cured of our spiritual malady,*

we must not shrink away when He is passing by ; that this is not to do as He would have us do ; it is not to treat Him as the pitiful, sympathizing Saviour would have us treat Him ; that we must rather make our way to Him "through the press," even until, with trembling hands, we can touch His sacred body ; that at that touch virtue shall come into us, until we "feel within ourselves that we are healed of our plague ;" until the iniquity which made us loathsome to ourselves is taken from us, because in the great mystery of God's forgiveness it is laid, all of it laid, on Him.

Come, therefore, with all the faith you have, make all the preparation that you can ; prepare yourselves by meditation on His death and passion ; kindle at the foot of His cross your love towards Him ; let Him, by that awful "lifting up" of Himself, "draw you unto Him ;" prepare yourselves by asking for that enlightening, strengthening Spirit, which He has promised to send from heaven to you ; think not to show your humility by doubting His mercy ; hope not to please Him by disobeying His last command ; fancy not that you revere His memory by neglecting to "do this in remembrance of Him." Above all, search most jealously whether there be in your secret hearts any lurking sin that is engendering in *you all this shrinking* from the presence of the all-

seeing One; any cherished transgression, that, while it keeps you from His Table, eats also into your whole inner life, and prevents your Christian energies from growing and expanding as they ought to do.

But, alas! I know that there is a large class besides to which I must address myself; it is the class of the young and vigorous; of those who act as though they thought that this Holy Communion was intended only for the weak and failing.

I know, indeed, that there are multitudes in the prime of life who dare not come to this sacred Ordinance, because the sins of the flesh pollute them, or the world, with its business or its pleasures, is mastering their souls. They must be changed indeed before they can find a blessing here.

But there are others who do wish, in the main, to serve God in their youth and strength, who yet never partake of this blessed Sacrament.

I cannot help thinking that false shame, and enslaving habit, and misconception, have much to do with this most melancholy fact.

My Brethren, I am not so old as to have forgotten what it was to be young. I can sympathize with the rush and eagerness of a young life. I know the temptations to religious cowardice which assail you who live much with those to whom life is *in its heyday* still. I know the fear that, in

earlier years especially, makes men shrink from being thought peculiarly good. I know the subtlety of that suggestion which is constantly whispering to you, "Not yet; but by and by." I understand all this; but I remember also that it was especially a *young* man's pattern that our Saviour set us; that when He hung upon the cross He was but thirty-three. I believe also devoutly in the manliness, the beauty, the exceeding happiness of a strong, unsated, hopeful life, received as God's gift, and rendered back (as by His grace it may be) quite naturally to Him. I cannot forget that in a young man or maiden an honest, unpretending, thorough serving of God is of all examples to others the most winning, of all prospects to themselves the most delightful. I cannot but remember how unknown, tempestuous, perilous, are the temptations that in youth beset and try to ruin us; and from God's Word and my own experience I say, that, of all outward acts, this partaking of the Lord's Supper is the one that will most arm you against the assaults of youthful sins, or recall you from them before you have become their slaves; that will most bring you the blessedness of a vigorous early piety.

But there is yet another class to whom I would speak, the class of those who in their younger *days have sinned* some grievous sin; a sin which

perhaps at the time paralyzed their souls, and made them helpless for good ; but a sin which they have long since forsaken, and loathed, and sorrowed for. To Christ they have learnt to come for pardon, to His merits, His pity, His tenderness, and yet they dare not take the Sacrament of His Body.

My dear brother or sister, let me say a word of strength to you. Over you God and His holy angels are even now rejoicing ; for you Christ remembers joyfully that He did not die in vain ; His blood can wash away the deepest stain, and leave no trace behind ; in God's free pardon there is no imperfectness, no grudging reserve ; nay (let me say it boldly), by your very fall He is able, in His mysterious mercy, to lift you higher than without it ever you had attained, making it to you a discipline in humility, self-knowledge, gratitude, love. You need all the comforting, strengthening, reinstating that He can give you. Come then here and take them. For whom but for His returning Prodigal does the Father prepare the feast ? To whom but to those who cling to Him does virtue go out from the Saviour's Body ? To whom more than to those who are much forgiven does much love come ? Here, then, receive the seal of your pardon ; here at last find the peace which God the *Comforter* is able to restore to you.

Lastly, my Brethren, if there be any among you who take refuge in none of these excuses, nor indeed in any *special* excuse at all ; if there be those who acknowledge that it is their duty to come to this Sacrament, and who can assign no definite reason why they stay away, let them, ere it is too late, discover what the real reason is—that it can be no other than a lukewarmness about religion, a spiritual lethargy, which, if it is not shaken off, must end in spiritual death ; a state in which men fall the easy, nay, the unconscious prey to the active and ever-watchful enemy of souls. Oh ! that I could even now sound the note of alarm to such men, that they might be startled out of their most dangerous slumbering, and might, if only for a moment, gaze round them upon the wily foe that is besetting them, and all the countless dangers that are threatening. Surely that sight would make them feel that the battle cannot be won by a sleeping, lazy soldier ; that it is really for life or death, and demands the exercise of all the energies that we can muster ; nay, rather, that it demands a strength far beyond our own, even the strength which the Captain of our salvation can alone infuse into us, and that here, in this Sacrament, He offers it to us, that in its might we may go forth valiantly to the battle.

In the first ages of the Church to be refused this

Holy Communion was to be an outcast from the Christian world, to suffer the highest spiritual penalty which those austere times knew how to inflict; think what it must be to inflict this penalty, as many among you through your whole life inflict it, upon yourselves.

THE END.

